SECTION 8
EIGHT PAGES

The Sun.

Drama—Music—Special Articles

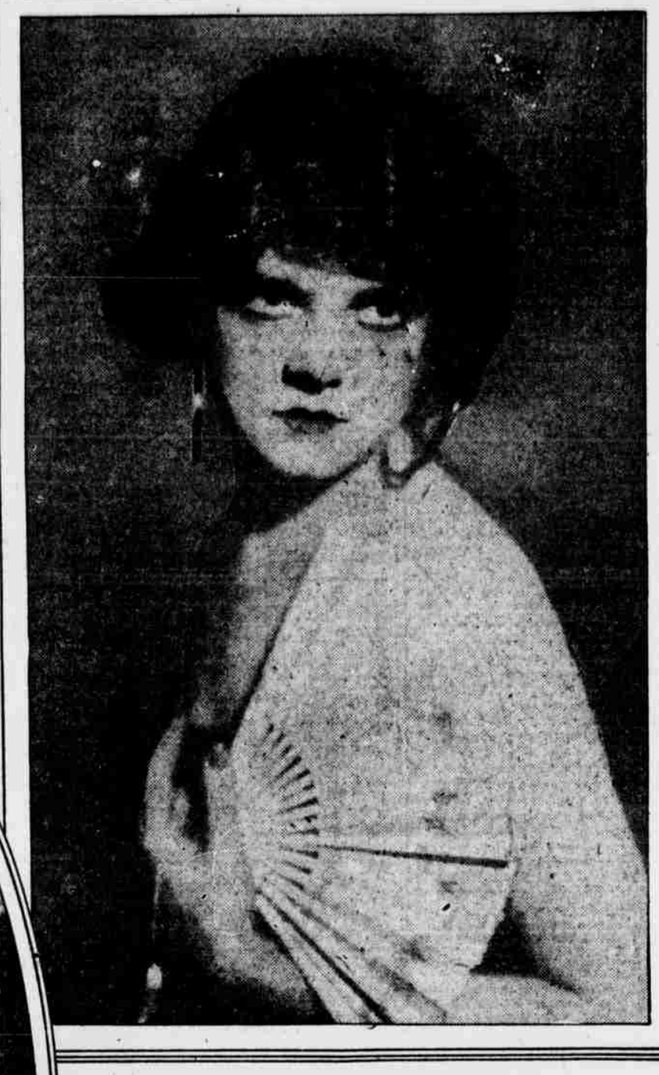
NEW YORK, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1919.—Copyright, 1917, by the Sun Printing and Publishing Association.

MORE COMIC PLAYS with MUSIC this WEEK

FLORENCE WALTON WHO DANCES TO-NIGHT WITH MAURICE at the SELWYN THEATRE.

INA CLAIRE in "THE GOLD DIGGERS"

PEGGY WOOD in "BUDDIES"



BABE MARLOWE in the NEW ZIEGFELD MIDNIGHT FROLIC.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

ONE by one the traditions of theatre life drop away to puzzle the playwright and make his lot more difficult. So many observers have remarked that the theatre is behind every other art in its perception of the progress of life that now nobody deserves the credit of mention for the discovery. But in that very tardiness lies the salvation of the dramatist. He is able to spin his tales based on the old conventions of life for years, after such theories are known to exist nowhere out of a playhouse. The quickness with which plays even by the least theatrical of writers date in comparison with the permanence of books, is illustrative of the general delay of dramatists in keeping up with the social procession. Indeed *Mrs. Warren* seems to-day about as passee as Pauline Tanqueray, although she was thought a much more rebellious and modern lady in her day.

At least two of the season's plays start from the hypothesis that the opposition of parents or guardians prevents the youth of the day from marrying the particular object of its affections. It matters little how inappropriate any such union may be from a social or natural point of view. Experience has shown that to-day Jack and Jill wed whomever they select. There may be, of course, parental objection and guardians may threaten, little as the force of their opposition is. But playwrights continue to write their little dramas as if this social theory were as binding to-day as it was when the Montagues and Capulets lived and loved in Verona.

There are other social conventions beloved of the playwright which are also certain to change. The French theatre has been for many years based on the tacit agreement that the family and not the individual is the social unit. In this country and to only a slight extent in England, it is the individual and not the family that decides. If one may believe the word that comes from abroad, individualism is flourishing to a degree that precludes all simultaneous deference to the actual conditions of life and any recognition of the family as the source of action in the affairs of its members Young or old, they all want to do for themselves. It is *sauve qui peut* in case of a crash with no divided responsibility. It is now a characteristic of the changing times that the individual wishes to act altogether on his own initiative. He is frankly willing to take all the consequences that may follow. So the task of the playwright in appearing at once plausible and contemporaneous is not simple. But it is dollars to doughnuts that he will continue in the effort to be plausible rather than of the day. And it is in a high degree probable that the public would much prefer to have him keep to his old tricks and tell every tale as much as possible in the mode of the theatre.

More in sorrow than anger an admiring reader does not hesitate to tell us just what he thinks of the guy who wrote that the playwright and not the actor is the creator of a good part. His letter, so correctly addressed, shows that he knows the identity of the guy, but that does not diminish his eloquence nor modify the violence of his language concerning an attempt to belittle the art, if not the genius, of the actor. He mentions the names of some of the illustrious players of the past, such as Edwin Booth, Henry Irving, and in our time Julia Marlowe, Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt. Of course it is just such players that the writer in THE SUN excepted when he referred to the unusual geniuses that illuminate with their own gifts whatever they may touch. There are some of these gifted actors before the public to-day and they are a source of unalloyed delight. But they are few in number.

In the case of the rank and file of actors it is altogether the playwright who makes them impressive or otherwise. One simple test of the advantage a player may possess is shown by the recent experiences of a young man hitherto unknown here. He was highly praised for his acting in the role of a cowboy. He is young, personable, speaks with rather a natural drawl and is undeniably possessed of that quality which it is usual to call "magnetism." He acted intelligently but was acclaimed as if he were a heaven sent genius sailing to earth in a shower of fire.

Now it is a well recognized rule of the stage that the actor who is ignorant of what the audience and the other characters on the stage already know when he appears, is going to claim at once the attention of the public. The spectators aware of certain facts watch the latest man in the keenest expectation of seeing the way in which he receives the news. It is a psychological interest based on thoroughly human motives. How will he take it? What will he do? It happens in most cases that the knowledge he is destined to acquire is of vital importance to him. So the concern of the observers is easy enough to understand.

Now it happens that this young actor named James Rennie is in every scene in which he appears ignorant of what is known to the other men and women of "Moonlight and Honeysuckle." He does not know that the girl he loves is only making believe when she tells her lovers that she has been the victim of a seducer. He does not know that neither of these two men could possibly be the person she has invented for the purposes of her jest. In one very ingeniously devised scene between three men the Western lover is ignorant of everything connected with the story, while each of the other men knows only that he is not guilty. George Scarborough has managed this episode with uncommon technical skill. Of course the man who comes out of the acting of such an episode with the greatest honors is he who knew least. It is Mr. Rennie. He is an attractive young player. But any uncommon honors he may have gleaned out of "Moonlight and Honeysuckle" are attributable to Mr. Scarborough rather than to the actor. In the majority of cases this is likely to prove true. The heaven born genius is in these days rarer than the playwright, scarce as he may be.

The old rule that experience teaches does not always appear to hold in the theatre. Otherwise Joseph Urban would have few opportunities to provide the investiture of any spoken play relying on modern life in any of its forms. He is preeminently suited to the vast auditorium with his artistic creations kept in their place by an orchestra of one hundred and as many singers. Otherwise he will take the floor to the exclusion of all else in the drama, whether it be the men and women, the story or the acting. When he paints his own curtain, he is even there between the acts. Yet there are courageous managers who glory in the luxury of a "production" by Urban.

Outside of the operatic field these artistic undertakings have prospered only in the service of the decorative Mr. Ziegfeld. There the painter keeps within the realm of fantasy. No element of probability interferes with the fullest revelation of his powers. The results are usually charming. There is rarely cause for quarrelling with Urban of the Follies or Urban of the Metropolitan. But even the Urban of operetta is incomprehensible at times. There is one notably irritating example of his work or view just now. It is altogether in the realm of operetta and the painter need not have been held down by any thoughts of realism.

But he paints a drawing room of a Fifth avenue house in cobalt blue and dull gray. The combination is inconceivably depressing and destructive of all sense of lightness and gayety. Over the doors are lunettes of still life which are the single grateful spots for the eye to rest on. Painted on the walls are two tapestries in a low tone of color, a reddish yellow predominating in one. This combination of tones was difficult enough. But there was still worse to come.

Mr. Urban seems to resent vacant spaces. He detests them. In his view spaces were meant to put paint on wherever they happen to be. So on the walls, in addition to the lunettes and the tapestries, he has painted medallions in relief ornamented with flowing ribbons. A more depressing scene for the gayeties of operetta it would not be easy to design. But in this case there is no real harm done.

The fate of "A Young Man's Fancy," however, was different. It was a spoken drama. Anybody who remembers previous experiments of the kind will not forget the sacrifice of all dramatic values which inevitably follows the realization of a spoken play by the Viennese painter. There was little of value in Mr. McIntyre's play. But it would never have survived the Urban investiture.

Even Shakespeare has been known to succumb. Phyllis Neilson-Terry is maybe the tallest woman on the stage. When Mr. Urban made her scenes for "Twelfth Night" they were so arranged that she was kept down near the front of the stage, with the decorations towering above her. The result was an exaggeration of her size until she seemed to be a strutting giantess. When "The Garden of Paradise" was designed for Emily Stevens, then a slender woman, the very depths of the stage of the Park Theatre were plumbed that the uttermost amount of space might be gained. Miss Stevens against all this depth looked on the backgrounds like a fly on the wall. Yet Joseph Urban is still summoned to devise decorations for the spoken drama.

THE WEEK'S OFFERINGS.

MONDAY—Playhouse: Arthur Hopkins will present Wilton Lackaye in "Palmy Days," a new play which will restore the Augustus Thomas influence to Broadway. Supporting the star will be Genevieve Tobin, George Le Guere, Thomas Walsh, Harry Southard, George Spaulding and a typical Hopkins cast of art fans.

Shubert Theatre: E. H. Sothern and Julia Marlowe stand by Shakespeare for the last week here. The entries are: "Twelfth Night," Monday and Tuesday; "Hamlet," Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday, and "The Taming of the Shrew" Friday night and Saturday matinee.

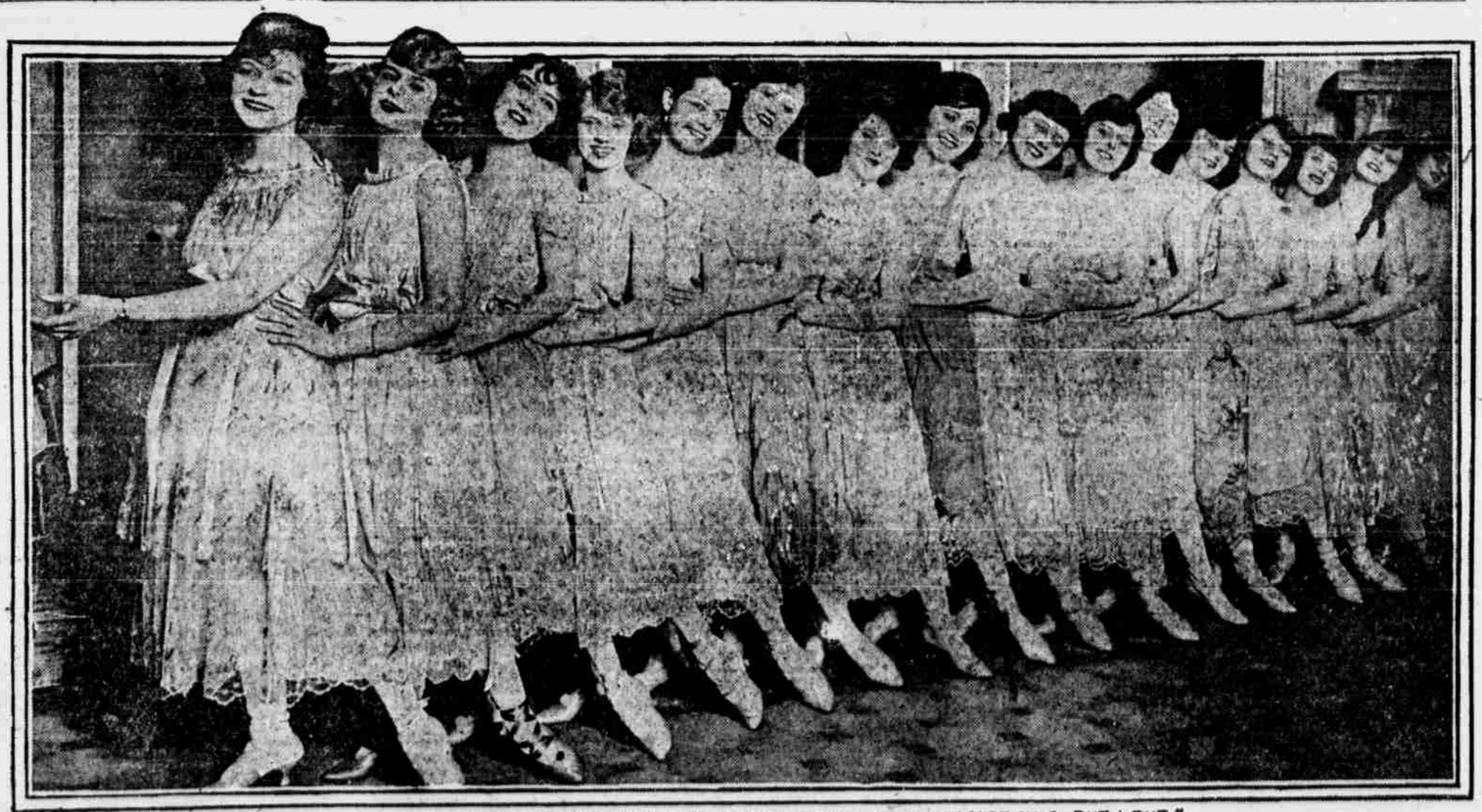
Selwyn Theatre: The Selwyns will release Donald Brian, Peggy Wood and Roland Young in "Buddies," a comedy of American soldiers in Brittany, by George V. Hobart, which B. C. Hilliam has charged with music under high pressure.

Comedy Theatre: The Scibilia Theatrical Enterprises will produce a new musical comedy, "Fifty Fifty, Ltd.," with music by Leon De Costa, and words to go with it by Margaret Michael and William Lennox. Herbert Corthell and Gertrude Vanderbilt will be the fifty fifty.

Cort Theatre: "Just a Minute" will be the latest Cort visitation to the musical comedy stage, since John Cort will produce it at his theatre, and Harry L. Cort has collaborated with George E. Stoddard and Harold Orlob in performing the necessary operations on it to provide room for the various vaudeville specialties. May Vokes, Mabel Withee and Wellington Cross will be allowed most of the spotlight.

PLAYS THAT LAST.

Astor, "East Is West"; Belmont, "Boys Will Be Boys"; Bijou, "His Honor Abe Potash"; Booth, "Too Many Husbands"; Broadhurst, "The Crimson Alibi"; Casino, "The Little Whopper"; Central, "Oh What a Girl"; Cohan & Harris, "The Royal Vagabond"; Criterion, "On the Hiring Line"; Eltinge, "The Girl in the Limousine"; Empire, "Declassee"; Forty-eighth Street, "The Storm"; Forty-fourth Street, "Hello, Alexander"; Fulton, "Five o'Clock"; Gaiety, "Lightnin'"; Garrick, "The Faithful"; George M. Cohan, "See-Saw"; Globe, "Apple Blossoms"; Harris, "The Dancer"; Henry Miller's, "Moonlight and Honeysuckle"; Hudson, "Clarence"; Knickerbocker, "Roly-Boly Eyes"; Liberty, "Hitchy-Koo"; Longacre, "Adam and Eva"; Lyceum, "The Gold Diggers"; Lyric, "Nothing but Love"; Manhattan Opera House, "The Luck of the Navy"; Maxine Elliott's, "First Is Last"; Morosco, "Civilian Clothes"; New Amsterdam, "Ziegfeld Follies"; New Amsterdam Roof, "Nine o'Clock Revue" and "Midnight Frolic"; Nora Bayes, "Greenwich Village Follies"; Plymouth, "The Jest"; Princess, "Nightie Night"; Punch and Judy, "Where's Your Wife?" Republic, "A Voice in the Dark"; Shubert, Sothern and Marlowe; Thirty-ninth Street, "Scandal"; Vanderbilt "At 9:45"; Winter Garden, "Passing Show."



THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS WHY IT IS SO EASY TO LOOK AT "NOTHING BUT LOVE"